

Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims

1-25. Cancelled

26. (Currently Amended) A method of filling a flexible-walled container having an open end comprising the steps of:

(i) purging substantially all oxygen from the interior of the container by introducing an inert gas;

(ii) introducing a foodstuff into the container;

(iii) over-inflating the container with inert gas beyond a desired volume;

(iv) subsequently ~~removing~~ mechanically squeezing the flexible wall of the container in order to remove a selected volume of the inert gas from the container to leave ~~a selected~~ the desired volume remaining in the container, the volume of inert gas remaining in the container being selected to reduce agglomeration of discrete pieces of foodstuff; and

(v) sealing the container.

27. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 26, wherein the step of introducing a foodstuff into the container is preceded by deploying the container from a folded to an unfolded configuration.

28. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 27 wherein the step of deploying the container from a folded to an unfolded configuration is achieved by means of gas inflation.

29. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 26, wherein, if the introduced foodstuff is substantially entirely solid in state, the step of purging substantially all oxygen from

the interior of the container is initiated before the step of introducing the solid foodstuff into the container.

30. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 26, wherein, if the introduced foodstuff is substantially entirely solid in state, the steps of purging substantially all oxygen from the interior of the container and introducing the solid foodstuff into the container are performed concurrently.

31. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 26, wherein, if the introduced foodstuff is substantially entirely liquid in state, the step of purging substantially all oxygen from the interior of the container is initiated after the step of introducing the liquid foodstuff into the container.

32. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 26, wherein, the step of introducing a foodstuff into the container involves introducing a substantially solid foodstuff followed by introducing a substantially liquid foodstuff; and wherein the step of purging substantially all oxygen from the interior of the container is ceased after the step of introducing the substantially solid foodstuff into the container.

33. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 29, wherein the container is inflated by an inert gas after introduction of the substantially solid foodstuff.

34. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 31, wherein the container is inflated by an inert gas after introduction of the substantially liquid foodstuff.

35. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 33, wherein the inert gas is introduced into the container by gas introduction means whilst the flexible wall of the open end of the container is engaged tightly against the gas introduction means.

36. (Previously Presented) a method as claimed in claim 35, wherein the gas introduction means is a nozzle with a substantially flat opening.

37. (Canceled)

38. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed claim 26, wherein the container is sealed by means of heat sealing.

39. (Canceled)

40. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 26, wherein the foodstuff is cereal based.

41. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 40, wherein the cereal is selected from the group consisting of rice, couscous, wild rice, barley, wheat, oats, rye, millet and maize.

42. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 26, wherein the flexible-walled container is a plastics pouch.

43. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 26, wherein the inert gas is selected from the group consisting of nitrogen, carbon dioxide, helium, argon, neon and xenon.

44. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 26, wherein oxygen gas forms less than 2% of the volume of gas within the container.

45. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 26, wherein oxygen gas forms less than 1% of the volume of gas within the container.

46. (Previously Presented) A flexible-walled container filled by the method of claim 26.